Towards Internalization and Ownership of English as an International Language

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INTRODUCTION

As an English teacher in Japan, I have grown increasingly aware of the need to promote the ownership of English as an International Language (hereafter EIL) as a central part of my teaching philosophy and for students to internalize it.

This paper begins with an outline of internalization and the ownership of EIL, in terms of what they are and why they should be important in English as a Foreign Language (hereafter EFL) teaching. Thereafter factors that prohibit their realization are discussed, such as the lack of student motivation and student apathy towards English. Finally, some thoughts on my own teaching and how I could manifest changes to promote internalization and ownership are discussed.

We now turn to the issue of what comprises a teaching philosophy and the meaning of internalization and ownership of EIL. The need for internalization and ownership of EIL among Japanese students is also discussed.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF INTERNALIZATION AND OWNERSHIP

A Teaching Philosophy and Methodology

There are a number of values and assumptions that together form the guiding principles of any syllabus, and these guide us as teachers to structure our classes in certain ways. Guiding principles relate to the system of ideas, beliefs and values, and could also be referred to as the approach, or the philosophy, of a syllabus.

These ideas, beliefs and values also underline the teaching methodology, which organizes how and what is taught. A teaching methodology is a collection of procedures exhibiting a perspective of language teaching (Boggles World's glossary of ESL terms: 2002). Among such ideas, beliefs and values in an English Language Teaching (ELT) program should ideally be the promotion of EIL ownership and its internalization among students.

Internalization

Internalization in ELT terminology commonly refers to acquiring the ability to learn or acquire English, but there is little reference to the internalization of teaching philosophies by students as an important part of that ability. It seems that we have to take the word "internalize" one step further in the sense that it becomes an "internalization of internalization".

According to the Cambridge International Dictionary of English (2002), the word "internalize" means:

> To accept or absorb (especially a way of behaving or thinking) as your own, often from repeated experience, so that it becomes a natural and important part of your character.

Using this as a guide, internalization in this paper entails the extent to which the students accept or absorb its philosophy and teaching methodology as their own, and whether it becomes a natural and important part of them. It also entails the extent to which they acquire a sense of ownership of English, as a language belonging to them, rather than something abstract and external. Internalization also implies empowerment, in the sense that Higgins (1999: 2) defines empowerment as being:

> …the process of providing each student with access, skill and expertise to tap the powers of their own minds and hearts so that they can investigate, interact with and develop themselves within the matrix of the world.

It cannot be assumed that students will automatically internalize the philosophy. Whilst learning may seem to be a process that naturally occurs in a teaching program, Offner (1997: 1) says:

> It is sometimes mistakenly assumed that, after years of schooling, each student has already acquired the proper learning skills…many times students simply don't know what they are supposed to do and when they do, they don't know how to go about doing it.

Learning and acquisition do not necessarily follow the imposition of methodology and materials. The syllabus philosophy also needs to be understood, perceived as beneficial and accepted to be internalized. Students need to understand and accept *why* they learn English in the manner they do. If the students could perceive how, and agree with the reasons why the philosophy is applied, they would have a clearer perspective of the purpose of learning to speak English.

The Ownership of English

Talebinezhad and Aliakbari (2001: 2) note:

> English is the language of the Industrial Revolution and remains the language of science and technology. More importantly, it is the language of the computer and Internet and is the chief language of tourism all over the world.

EIL refers to the use of English by non-native, as well as native English speakers of different nations as a medium for communication. It transcends national boundaries, and many social groups with distinct traditional languages and ethnic traditions. It started with the beginning of colonialism around 500 years ago and continues to the present age of globalization. (Smith 1976, Quirk 1978, Alptekin & Alptekin 1984, Stern 1992, Talebinezhad & Aliakbari 2001).

EIL is defined by Suzuki (1999), as English that is free from the cultural and linguistic influence of any one particular country, and which can be used to successfully communicate with other educated native or non-native speakers of English in any country of the world.

The ownership of EIL is closely related to cultural factors. Culture is about social identity where communication plays an important role (Podur, 2002). Culture can have different meanings, for example aesthetic, sociological, semantic and pragmatic (Adaskou, Britten and Fahsi, 1990: 3). A well-known definition by Wardaugh (1998: 217) views it as:

> …whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, and to do so in any role that they accept for any one of themselves.

From yet another perspective, it would seem that culture, is part of the "superstructure" of society, and is closely related to the economy, or "base" of society. According to Jorge (1983), the base represents the economic relations of production in society while the superstructure determines the social consciousness, which include all the cultural, social and ideological structures and its institutions such as education, and access to economic wealth is unequal and institutionally sustained in the interests of those in power.

While people identify and communicate with each other for many purposes, it would seem that the main purpose is for the economic sustenance of society. Without an economy to sustain it, it would appear that language, society and culture could have no foundation, or purpose, to exist (Strickland, 2002). The role of EIL, and EFL, is therefore significant in terms of national as well as global economic relations and subsistence. Moreover, it is relevant to survival in particular (Jeffrey, 2002).

It is widely accepted that EIL, as part of the colonial infrastructure, sustained unbalanced shares of economic wealth and harmful international relationships historically (Mabogunje 1980, Kaplan 1987, Phillipson 1992, Holliday 1994, Tully 1997). In addition, EIL continued, and still continues, to marginalize minority cultures and destroy their indigenous languages (Friere 1972, Abbott 1992, Tully 1997, Wurm 2001). Skutnabb-Kangas (1999: 2) states that only 10 percent of the approximately 6 800 languages left in the world will exist in 100 years time, and:

> …the media and the educational systems are the most important direct agents in language murder today; indirectly the culprits are the global economic and political systems.

It also appears to some that it is primarily America who benefits from globalization, and whether globalization should be referred to as 'Americanization'. According to this perspective, globalization is oppressive, resulting in social and economic divisions (Hoogvelt, 1997 and Castells, 1996).

However, there is fundamental change in EIL that is potentially transforming English to a language that can assist in improving socio-economic relationships. In the ex-colonial and non-native English speaking countries of Nigeria (Omodiaogbe, 1992 and Bisong, 1995), the Philippines (Agana, 1998) and Singapore (Abbott, 1992), people are adopting English, and taking ownership of it. This is an important turning point in the evolution of EIL.

English in these countries appears to no longer be imposed from the outside but rather as something that has become a part of the national culture. In this way, the depleting cultural and economic nature of EIL is being eroded and replaced by a potentially replenishing one for its former victims, who are taking ownership of English.

Non-native speakers of English now represent more than two-thirds of English speakers in the world (Crystal, 1997). Contemporary globalization also no longer renders any sense in differentiating native and non-native speakers of English, given that more exchanges take place between non-native speakers of English than between non-native and native speakers of English (Walker, 2001).

Thus, the traditional concept of "authentic" English within the framework of EIL has become problematic in that English now represents the words and cultures of many nations (Kramsch and Sullivan, 1996). English no longer belongs to any particular group of people, and non-native speakers are no longer mere consumers of the Western-Anglo-Saxon tradition. This is the meaning of ownership.

The Need for Ownership of English in Japan

Japan avoided the historically repressive impact of EIL. It was never colonized, and only subjected to a brief American occupation following the Second World War. Despite Japan being the world's second-largest economy and one of the largest markets for EFL teaching in the world, the bulk of the Japanese population is not fluent in English.

It has been argued that this is the consequence of geographical and historical influences. The Japanese have been isolated, both through being an island and through three centuries of government-imposed isolation. Despite being the first Asian country to adopt Western science and technology, the partnership did not sustain a mutual exchange of cultural values. This relegated foreign language education to relative insignificance (Koike, 2002).

Japan is experiencing economic difficulties that have persisted since the bursting of the 'bubble economy' a decade ago, with unprecedented post-war unemployment rates, and a general societal malaise (Ellington, 1999 and Matanle, 2001). The adverse economic situation is spilling over into social dissatisfaction with the educational system (Ellington, 2001). With regard to ELT, Hadley (1999: 7) stresses:

> Japan needs to focus less on the 'what' and 'how' of curriculum reform, and more on why innovative ELT curricula is important to it at large.

The above suggests a need for Japan to find innovative ways to face global challenges, and part of this could be the need to take ownership of English. According to Hadley (2002: 1):

> … more of Japan's citizens will need to acquire a greater level of proficiency in the English language, if Japan is to maintain its place as the world's second largest economy.

This is because Kaplan (1987: 144) indicates that the consequence of successful globalization:

> … is significantly tied to the availability of English because, for better or for worse, English is the language of science and technology.

Nonetheless, it is understandable that many Japanese might consider their culture, language and national identity to be under attack from the forces of globalization and EIL.

However, taking ownership of English in Japan, should involve the addition of English alongside Japanese, as a means of increasing communication internationally, as a basis of sustaining a strong Japanese economy. It should not imply a simultaneous sacrifice of Japanese culture, language and national identity. It is important to aim towards additive bilingualism, in that it wants its students to develop a comprehensible proficiency in spoken English without reduction or displacement of their cultural values or their primary language Japanese.

DE-MOTIVATION AS A BARRIER TO INTERNALIZATION AND OWNERSHIP

De-motivation is one of the greatest barriers to Japanese students internalizing and taking ownership of EIL. To understand this more clearly it is important to consider what motivation is in the first place.

What is Motivation?

Attitude is important because it affects students' motivation towards learning. Attitude is defined by Finchpark (2002: 2) as:

> …sets of beliefs about language learning, the target culture, their culture, the teacher, the learning task, etc.

Norris-Holt (2001: 1), referring to Crookes and Schmidt (1991), defines motivation as:

> …the learner's orientation with regard to the goal of learning a second language.

Motivation is also described as the impetus to create and sustain intentions and goal seeking acts (Ames and Ames, 1989). Motivation is related to attitude and *vice versa*, and both have an influence on learning and acquisition. Thus, they are also prerequisites for internalization and ownership.

Gardner's socio-educational model (1982) is unique in that it looks expressly at second language acquisition in the classroom. Three aspects of student motivation are highlighted in the model: effort (time and drive), desire (extent of language proficiency wished for) and effect (emotional reactions to language study). In an earlier study, Gardner and Lambert (1972: 132) highlighted "integrative motivation" which stresses "a sincere and personal interest in the people and culture represented by the other group" and "instrumental motivation" which stresses "the practical value and advantages of learning a new language".

Integrative motivation is the desire on the part of the student to feel an affinity with the people, the society and the culture of the language that is learned, and is usually referred to in the context of living in the target language community (Falk 1978, and Finegan, 1999). Instrumental motivation, on the other hand, concerns the practical and concrete rewards that student's desire (Hudson, 2000). This relates to achievement purposes such as passing an exam or getting a degree. A student's opinion of a given language is significantly shaped by its perceived usefulness and relevance to future career goals (Chambers, 1999).

Why is Motivation Lacking?

Norris-Holt (2001: 2) notes difficulties in applying the term "integrative" in a monoculture society like Japan. Indeed, Benson (1991) had difficulty using the terms integrative and instrumental among Japanese students. He made a third group and called it "personal", for example "pleasure at being able to read English, and enjoyment of entertainment in English" (Benson, 1991: 36 cited in Norris-Holt, 2001: 2). While Benson was able to find integrative and personal reasons in a limited sense, he could not find instrumental motivation. Norris-Holt

(2001: 4), says:

> Benson suggests that the student's rejection of instrumental motivation illustrates the view that students do not perceive English as having a vital role to play in their lives. He also makes the point that the rejection of instrumental reasons for the study of English may indicate that the Japanese language is considered adequate for normal daily verbal exchange.

High dropout and absentee rates are becoming common among the current student generation in universities and colleges throughout Japan because of a general apathy and world-weariness (McVeigh, 2001 and Burden, 2002). This lack of integrative and instrumental motivation stands in the way of the chances of Japan to take ownership of EIL. The challenge is to engender it among students.

Part of the reason is that high school English activities are geared towards preparing students for the university entrance examinations. The entrance examinations are not aimed at assessing the speaking and listening skills, but grammar and reading skills. Norris-Holt (2001: 3) says:

> Certainly, a high percentage of both junior and senior high school students identify the major reason for English study as a necessity for achievement in examinations.

Learning merely grammar and reading, without conversational skills, is de-motivational, and becomes fairly deeply ingrained after six years. Their attitude of English as something unpleasant has become difficult to reverse.

Also, university life in Japan is generally accepted as a peaceful and relaxing respite between high school and working life, and the future of students is not primarily determined by academic performance, as Wright (1997: 2) points out:

> A student's future position in society is decided by the name of the school from which they graduate, not by the grades they attained there. Successful socialization and the development of a well-rounded member of society are the goals of college life, not academic rigor.

Thus, with no more university entrance exam to study for, and no sense of academic challenge, many university students lose academic direction (Norris-Holt, 2001). This further erodes motivation.

It is also important to consider the role of transfer with regard to motivation, internalization and ownership. Brunner (1960: 31) says:

> The best way to create interest in a subject is to render it worth knowing, which means to make the knowledge gained usable in one's thinking beyond the situation in which learning has occurred.

Transfer is the application of prior knowledge to fresh learning circumstances (McKeough, 1995), and is frequently viewed as the learning purpose, and the degree to which it takes place is a measure of accomplishment (Pea, 1987 and Perkins, 1991). Ngeow (1998: 1) says:

> Research suggests that transfer and motivation are mutually supportive in creating an optimal learning environment. If the learner perceives what he is learning to be relevant and transferable to other situations, he will find learning meaningful, and his motivation to acquire the skill or knowledge will increase.

For transfer to take place, the student must be motivated to do two things: firstly, recognize opportunities for transfer, and secondly, possess motivation to take advantage of recognized opportunities (Prawat, 1989). Yet, Gray (1999: 45) says:

> The bald fact is that most students are only taking English classes because they are required to, many have no real interest in really learning it …and they are acutely aware that they will never use English outside the classroom.

While ministry officials, politicians and business leaders have been calling for years for the creation of programs to produce a creative workforce that is globally minded and fluent in English (Tanaka, 1996; Daily Yomiyuri, 1996) the reality is that, in Japan, English is only significant in the domain of education (Hadley, 1997). Even in the multinational companies of Tokyo, English is restricted to e-mail, faxes and letters (Kirkwold, et al, 1995).

The lack of academic direction and transfer opportunities, combined with rising unemployment, has led to a rise in social problems among students, who have been described by Roche (1999: 23) as:

> …dyeing their hair yellow, wearing rings in their noses and crying into Kirins on the fringes of society.

These problems also affect students psychologically, especially through stress and anxiety. Prior experience with foreign language instruction in a classroom environment affects a learner's desire to study foreign languages in the future (Chambers, 1999). Once a student has become de-motivated, it is difficult to reverse. This is because anxiety replaces motivation.

Motivation and the filtering process are also closely related. As Finchpark (2002: 9) notes:

> Learners do not attend to all the input they receive. They attend to some features, and 'filter' other features out. This often depends on affective factors such as motivation, attitudes, emotions and anxiety.

While a low filter has little anxiety and contributes to higher levels of comprehension and attention, a high filter is full of anxiety that causes students to develop psychological barriers to learning (LeLoup, 2000).

Anxiety can be debilitative or facilitative, depending on its quantity (Alpert and Haber, 1960). Student stress and anxiety is often debilitative having a negative affect on learning English (Naimon, Frohlich, Stern and Todesco, 1978). Anxiety plays a subtle role, yet is a barrier to student success in communication activities (Balili, 2002). Correlations exist between high anxiety and low scores, according to Pimsleur, Mosberg and Morrison (1962), and noted by Hadley (1994). Situations perceived as threatening (Lazarus and Folkman, 1985) or lack of student confidence (Bandura, 1977) are significant contributors to stress and anxiety.

Studies tend to agree that sincerity and openness between teachers and students are important contributors towards motivation (Niederhauser, 1997). Dornyei (2001: 116) cited in Thanasoulas (2002: 1) notes:

> …teacher skills in motivating learners should be seen as central to teaching effectiveness.

Given the low levels of student motivation in Japan, and the reasons for it, teachers shoulder much responsibility, as they are required to play a very important role in motivation. Teachers need to convey enthusiasm to minimize the potential psychological distance and the propensity for students to create mental barriers between themselves and the target language as well as its culture.

However, teachers need to be motivated in order to motivate students. Just as student stress is easily overlooked, teacher stress can be easily overlooked as well. A de-motivated teacher will considerably exacerbate the stress and negative attitude of the students.

Martin (2002) notes that English language courses primarily take the needs of students as well as that of other stakeholders in the academic community into consideration. Content teachers are not just beneficiaries of ELT, but also active partners in the process. This is considered important for teacher motivation, which is in turn important for student motivation.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON PROMOTING INTERNALIZATION AND OWNERSHIP

To take ownership of EIL and internalize this philosophy, students need to understand and accept the philosophy and perceive English as something belonging to them that they can use, rather than as something external that they learn about. For this to happen, students need to perceive that they can both approve and benefit from the way English is taught, and express a wish to transfer their skills after one year in Freshman English. Motivation is therefore also an important consideration in regards to ownership and philosophical internalization. Ownership and internalization are thus ideals towards which students could strive, but the extent of success in this respect is difficult to gauge. The students are friendly and cooperative, and seem to enjoy their classes, but it is difficult to tell if ownership and internalization are taking place.

The nature of a teaching approach is bound to have an impact on internalization, ownership and motivation, as Stern (1992: 24) explains:

> Some methods imply a specific teaching approach. For example, in an audio-lingual program the teacher is firmly in command, directing the class step by step in a benevolent but authoritarian manner. This view of teaching is in contrast to an approach in which the teacher and students are viewed as participants in a joint enterprise, democratically negotiating with each other about what to learn and how to learn it.

Similarly, White (1988) distinguishes between Type A and Type B syllabuses. He refers to Type A syllabuses as focusing on the *what* is to be learned and the Type B syllabus as focusing on the *how* it is to be learned. As White (1988: 91) says:

> What Type A syllabuses have in common is a basis in content. In this respect they conform to the traditional definition of a syllabus as an organized statement of content of things to be learnt.

On the other hand, White (1988: 94) refers to a Type B syllabus as:

> …a move…from content to process of learning and procedures of teaching – in other words, to methodology.

These paradigms are similar to those of Wilkins (1976: 2-13), who referred to "synthetic" and "analytic" syllabuses. There is much support for Type B syllabuses in ELT literature. For example, Ngeow (1998: 3) says that students can be motivated by:

> … letting them identify and decide for themselves relevant learning goals. This will motivate them to apply what they have learned to attain these learning goals.

Thus Thanasoulas (2002: 4) recommends:

> …to inspire learners to concern themselves with most learning activities, we should find out their goals and the topics they want to learn, and try to incorporate them into the curriculum.

Many approaches claim to be Type B but lean towards a one-way flow of information with little consultation with students (Johnson, 1989). Conversely, some do not do not claim to be student-centered and are deliberately highly structured through intricate administrative networking and interconnections. My own teaching approach conforms directly to this, since my students are not involved in the formulation of the syllabus, nor do they make any input into the choice of textbook and lesson planning. Classroom activities are followed exactly are they are presented in the lesson plans. Students have some input through surveys that are regularly administered in terms of student attitudes with a view to improving the syllabus, but the surveys are generalized, not individualized.

One reason for the highly structured nature of my approach is the fact that I desire tangibility, and this makes it become as coordinated, structured and consistent as possible. However, the main reason as to why it is Type A in nature is because of the challenge of inducing passive and essentially de-motivated students to internalize the philosophy and take ownership in one academic year via a semi-intensive and skills-based approach. Whilst this may be appropriate, given the circumstances, it could be beneficial to consider and experiment with possible alternatives, especially in regards to being more student-centered in nature.

The philosophy of internalization and ownership of EIL may appear fairly straightforward to a teacher, but it is beyond the comprehension of an average 18-year-old Japanese student who has only experienced grammar drilling based approaches before entering university. Perhaps these make them see English as something to be administered, rather than that which should grow from within (as does ownership and internalization). If the students are told about the philosophy, many seem to forget. When they are shown how the guiding principles apply to practice, it is possible that some may remember. However, if they are involved in the formulation of the guiding principles, their understanding would increase, and so too, their ownership and internalization.

I would like my approach to remain the same for the first semester given that it does induce passive students to communicate. Nevertheless, I hope to make changes to incorporate more elements of student-centeredness that can be introduced in the second semester. Students need to start thinking about why they are studying English and formulating their own goals during the second semester. This could be undertaken on an experimental basis, perhaps by setting one day of the week aside for goal formulation, which can in turn be included in the guiding principles. Regular feedback will be important to sustain the motivation created by this.

There are essentially two directions that my teaching could take in the future. It could maintain its highly structured nature and lower its ambitions for internalization and ownership, or alternatively add aspects of student-centeredness and actively pursue ownership and internalization. I would like to experiment more with student-centeredness, and investigate new student-based approaches for enhancing ownership, internalization and motivation.

I have come to realize the importance and challenge of encouraging students to internalize the syllabus philosophy and to take ownership of EIL. Motivation seems to be the key to success in this regard. Without adequate student motivation, it is hard to achieve much else, and this is true of any teaching situation. I have also realized that ongoing research and experimentation in such aspects is necessary for the continued improvement of my teaching style. The mere assumption that internalization and ownership do take place on their own accord is only something realized in the amount of considerable effort and application it takes to do so.

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